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ABSTRACT

As a community service, Jackson State Community College has developed programs for training paraprofessionals in the field of reading and communication skills to become proficient enough in the instruction of reading skills to assist disabled readers. The suggested sources of paraprofessional trainees are college students, mothers, company wives, elderly people, and groups of concerned citizens. The training program is broken into three distinct phases: theory, practicum, and supervised employment. In the theory phase, the trainees are tested for knowledge of reading skills and provided with instruction in the methodology of teaching reading skills and the preparation and use of materials. In the practicum phase, the trainees are involved in preparation of materials and consultation with the reading specialist, tutoring of students, and in self-evaluation. The supervised employment phase involves periodic visits by the reading specialist to provide on-the-job assistance to the paraprofessionals and a weekly seminar. A pilot project has been conducted, and application is being made for funds to conduct a comprehensive program. A flow chart for the training process, a list of materials to be used, and references are included. (Author/AW)

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As a community service, Jackson State Community College has developed programs of training paraprofessionals in the field of reading and communication skills. The objective of the training was to teach paraprofessional personnel to become proficient enough in the instruction of reading skills to assist disabled readers. The need for such personnel was evidenced by (a) the large number of disabled readers,(1) (b) the shortage of reading specialists, and, (c) the lack of money sufficient to afford specialists for instruction of small groups of students.(7)

The training program is broken into three distinct phases: theory, practium, and supervised employment. Because the curriculum is primarily one of performance there is a number of terminal points within the program to permit the exit of any trainee who fails to exhibit the qualifications necessary for the paraprofessional in reading.

The paraprofessional will not be the answer to all reading problems, however, their training can help us to provide competent services for a larger number of students at a lower cost. And this help is needed now!

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A PROGRAM TO TRAIN PARAPROFESSIONALS IN READING INSTRUCTION

If a six year old child entering school had any idea of the enormous complexity of the task of learning to read, there would be more dropouts after kindergarten. The child is faced with learning the skills of decoding and visualization, the linguistic structure of language, semantic variations in the meaning of words, reading for implied as well as literal meanings, and reading to evaluate ideas.(3) Some children begin the mastery of these skills at six or younger; others have not progressed far along the way when they reach college.(2)

Colleges which adhere to the "open door" policy are presently faced with the problem of students who have not learned to read well enough to cope with college material. They need help now.(6) Equally in need of help are younger students who, if they do not receive extra instruction in reading now, will not master the skills they need to function in a technologically oriented world. Who is to help them? Professionally trained reading specialists can help them; but they are all too few. The services of the few can be increased greatly by the use of trained paraprofessionals.(5)

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Paraprofessionals in a College Communication Skills Laboratory

As a community service, Jackson State Community College has developed programs of training paraprofessionals in the field of reading and communication skills. One program is now in use in the Communication Skills Laboratory of the Division of Technology of Jackson State Community College; the other program, planned for younger children, is presently a pilot program.

The paraprofessional program for the junior college reading and study skills center evolved out of necessity. The number of college students needing assistance in meeting academic standards was too large to be helped by the professionally trained personnel available. Data on one hundred twenty-five technology students at Jackson State Community College (1970-1971) revealed that over sixty percent of those students had vocabulary skills inadequate for comprehension of college level textbooks. Two young ladies, each with a bachelor's degree, one in science and one in English, were added to the staff for the purpose of tutoring in any subject in which students were experiencing difficulty. The young ladies served as counselors and tutors, even auditing courses unfamiliar to them in order that they might be of more help to students.

During the first quarter of their employment, the paraprofessionals' training in reading instruction was largely incidental. They read professional books concerning remedial

and developmental reading. By observing and working with the reading specialist, the trainees became familiar with diagnostic and corrective techniques used in assisting students with reading problems.

Because of an increased enrollment and the enthusiasm shown by the paraprofessionals, the administrators decided to allow each of the ladies to teach one three-hour course in Communication Skills in addition to their tutoring load. Under the supervision of the reading specialist, the paraprofessionals developed a program of remediation for each of their students.

The ladies did a splendid job relating with their students, often being responsible for keeping discouraged students in school. One student enrolled in Communication Skills was considered essentially unable to learn. However, through the keen insight of one paraprofessional, it was discovered that he had good comprehension on written materials but could not comprehend oral directions nor respond orally. The paraprofessional took the initiative to have this student checked by a speech therapist. It was discovered that this student had very poor auditory discrimination skills. He was unable to distinguish between such words as "school" and "cool"; he recognized and used very few blends. We are now investigating the various sources available for funding the therapy he needs.

Although little valid data could be gathered over such

a short period of time, the trainees gained in self-confidence and skill, as did their students. It seems significant that both paraprofessionals at the junior college level are now pursuing graduate courses in reading.

A Program to Train Reading Technicians

The success experienced with this group inspired the development of a program to train paraprofessionals as "reading technicians". The program was planned by the Communication Skills Laboratory of Jackson State Community College, with the assistance of the Children's Clinic of Jackson. It is anticipated that college credit will be offered for the training.

Planning the Program

The objective of the training was to teach paraprofessional personnel to become proficient enough in the instruction of reading skills to assist disabled readers.(4) The need for such personnel was evidenced by (a) the large number of disabled readers,(1) (b) the shortage of reading specialists, and, (c) the lack of money sufficient to afford specialists for instruction of small groups of students.(7) Even though the need for paraprofessionals was evident, the following questions arose: Would the paraprofessional be well received by the public? Where would paraprofessionals be employed? What kind of tasks would the reading technician be able to perform? How would technicians be selected and trained?

Finally, how would such a program be funded?

In an attempt to answer these questions, superintendents, instructional supervisors, reading specialists, classroom teachers, pediatricians, and parents were queried regarding their reception of the paraprofessional in reading. After the assurance that trained personnel would be utilized as tutors of reading in classrooms, in reading centers, in pediatric clinics, and for individual students needing extra help, preparations for the training program began.

Sources of Paraprofessionals

Suggested as sources of paraprofessional trainees are: (a) college students, (b) mothers who want employment during school hours only, (c) young mothers who want a few hours out of the house each day, (d) company wives (newcomers to the area who have few acquaintances and desire to become involved in local activities), (e) elderly people, and (f) groups of concerned citizens who sincerely wish to be of service to those who need help.

Philosophy of the Staff

It is the philosophy of the staff of the Communication Skills Laboratory that the reading technicians would not become qualified to diagnose, prescribe for, and cure all reading problems. However, technicians should have a basic understanding of the reading process and be able to follow a prescribed program of remediation. Remediation in reading is usually slow-moving, requiring a highly structured program with much practice. The

use of paraprofessionals thus permits the reading specialist to perform the job for which he or she was trained.(7)

Tasks for Reading Technicians

Paraprofessionals have been used successfully in Project 16, a Title III ESEA total school reading program. Some tasks which trained reading technicians are capable of performing are: (a) administer skills checks (not evaluate or interpret them), (b) give standardized tests, (c) test visual acuity with the telebinocular, and (d) give auditory tests such as the Maico and the Wepman. They may also be taught to assist students with programmed instructional material such as the Hoffman Reader (an audio-visual machine with records, filmstrips, and matching worksheets), the Peabody Language Development Kits, and the Sullivan Readiness program. They may help students use audio-visual material such as the overhead projectors and individual filmstrip viewers; they may show films and film-loops to groups of students. They may write stories from dictation, using the language-experience approach.

Reading technicians can help students in building perceptual skills using block patterns, visual memory games, rhythms, and the balance beam. Word bingo, word checkers, and linguistic games may be used by paraprofessionals. Response cards like those in the Durrell-Murphy Speech-to-Print Phonics may be used with groups of students. Reading technicians can conduct practice exercises with basic word lists, blends, and word families. Programs for use with the Language

Master may be devised and used. The use of materials such as the Barnell Loft Specific Skills Series and the EDL Study Skills Kits may be supervised by reading technicians. Paraprofessionals can construct CLOZE exercises and use them with individual students or with groups.

Phases of the Training Program

The training program is broken into three distinct phases: theory, practium, and supervised employment. It is suggested that college credit be offered as follows: three hours each for the theory and practium phases of the program; and six hours for the supervised employment phase.

During the theory phase, the trainees will be tested for knowledge of reading skills and be provided with instruction in the methodology of teaching reading skills and the preparation and use of materials. Training under this phase will be comprehensive and specific. The duration of the period will be approximately four weeks, depending on the ability of the students and the intensity of the training offered.

In the practium phase, poor readers will be selected on the basis of psycho-educational diagnosis. The primary purpose for this phase of the project is to ascertain the effectiveness of the paraprofessional as a tutor in reading. Each day may be divided as follows: preparation of materials and consultation with the reading specialist, tutoring of students, and in self-evaluation or sharing with the group.

The supervised employment phase will involve periodic visits

by the reading specialist to provide on-the-job assistance to the paraprofessionals. A seminar will be held weekly with the reading specialist and the entire group of trainees to share experiences and materials. Upon successful completion of this training period, a certificate will be awarded to each trainee. (For a flow chart of the program, see Table I.)

Challenge to the Public and to the Professional

Due to the limitation of time, only a pilot project has been conducted at this time. It was funded by a group of interested citizens. Application is being made for federal funds to conduct a comprehensive program in the training of paraprofessionals in the field of reading.

One thing that should be stressed is that with such minimal training the students do not become qualified to diagnose, prescribe for or cure all educational ailments, nor to tell teachers how or what to teach, nor to tell administrators how to run a school. Even if the educational system leaves much to be desired, they will succeed better in helping children, which is their main objective, if they work within the system.

Even with problems which will surely occur, the paraprofessional in reading instruction can do a noble job. It is up to us as professionals to train them in order that we may provide competent services for the largest number of students at the least possible cost. And they need help <u>now</u>!

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SOME MATERIALS FOR USE IN TRAINING PARAPROFESSIONALS

American Guidance Service, Inc.
Publishers' Building
Circle Pines, Minnesota 55014
(Peabody Language Development Kits)

Barnell Loft, Ltd.
111 S. Centre Avenue
Rockville Centre
Long Island, N.Y. 11571
(Barnell Loft Skill Series)

Bell & Howell Company
7100 McCormick Road
Chicago, Illinois 61645
(Language Master)

Educational Development Laboratories, Inc.
Huntington, N.Y. 11743
(Skill Builder Kits)

Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation
425 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(Language Experience in Reading)

Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich
1372 Peachtree St. N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30309
(Bookmark Series)

Harper & Row, Publishers
2500 Crawford Ave.
Evanston, Illinois 60201
(Content Readers)

Hoffman Information Systems
5623 Peck Road
Arcadia, California 91006
(Hoffman Reader)

Keystone View Company
Meadville, Pennsylvania 16335
(Keystone Telebinocular)

Learning with Laughter
P.O. Box 3202
Springfield, Mass. 01101
(Learning with Laughter)

Lyons and Carnahan
407 East 25th St.
Chicago, Illinois 60616
(Learning Games Set: Phonics We Use)

Reader's Digest
Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570
(Skill Builders)

Scholastic Book Services
904 Sylvan Avenue
Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632
(Scholastic Individualized)
(Scholastic Action)

Science Research Associates, Inc.
259 East Erie ST.
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(SRA Labs)
(We Are Black Series)

Scott, Foresman and Company
1900 East Lake Avenue
Glenview, Illinois 60025
(Open Highways)

Sullivan Associates
Behavioral Research Laboratories
Box 577
Palo Alto, California 94304
(Sullivan Readiness Program)

A Flow Chart for Training Paraprofessionals in Reading

"A Performance Curriculum"[8]